

# Officials predict rosy 2001 for business

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With dot-COM's floundering, the stock market falling and a new president in office, how will central Michigan fair if the national economy continues slowing down?

"We can absolutely weather a slowdown," said George Dunn, president of Middle Michigan Development Corporation, an agency that promotes Isabella and Clare counties for industrial and economic growth.

"We are very diverse," Dunn said. "Communities that can't handle a slowdown are heavily into one arena or another, such as the automobile industry or agriculture."

Gratiot County used to rely heavily on the automobile industry, said Donald Schurr, president of Greater Gratiot Development Inc., an agency similar to MMDC.

"We've become much more diverse over the last 12 years," Schurr said.

"We now have plastics and other manufacturers of consumer goods as well as Tier I and Tier II suppliers to the automobile industry," Schurr said. "If the automobile industry slowed down, we'd feel it, but not at the magnitude of 10 years ago."

Although we can expect some economic slowdown, Dunn said central Michigan will still maintain a healthy level of industry.

"The economy has been screaming along for the last two years," Dunn said. "You can't maintain that forever."

Schurr said industry might move a little slower in 2001, but "only because the last 18 months have been so hectic".

"I don't think you can continue at that pace," Schurr said. "Last year, nobody even took a breath because it was a mild winter."

"Industry and development will be more normal this year."

Isabella and Clare counties have several projects in the planning and development stages.

"In Mt. Pleasant's University Park, we're going after high tech data-based technology," Dunn said. "By the end of



Sun photograph by KATHERINE JOHNSON

**George Dunn, the president of Middle Michigan Development Corporation of Mt. Pleasant, stands near the University Park Office Center. The Office Center is one of the newest additions to the University Park, which has plans to become a designated SmartZone by mid-January.**

January, we should know if the state will designate the park as a SmartZone."

A SmartZone is a cluster of technological and research institutions.

Mt. Pleasant's SmartZone proposal includes an IDEA Institute to research and develop business intelligence solutions in collaboration with IBM, Meijer Corp., Dow Chemical Corp. and CMU.

The state might designate a few SmartZones in the very near future, and up to 10 may be designated by

2003.

"I think the SmartZone will be a go," Dunn said.

Farwell also has a new Renaissance Zone, Dunn said.

"Farwell Enterprise Park on the north edge of Farwell is a tax-free zone for business and industry establishment," he said. "It will continue to grow in 2001."

Breckenridge and Wheeler also have a Renaissance Zone, Schurr said.

"We have approximately 500 acres to develop," Schurr said. "There will

be industrial, commercial and residential opportunities in that area."

The Breckenridge site is still in the planning stages, however.

"We're working with the village to come up with a master plan," Schurr said. "We'll develop it from there."

Schurr expects a good 2001.

"I think mid Michigan is positioned very well and has a diverse economic base," Schurr said.

Dunn agrees.

"From an industrial standpoint, the 2001 economy looks very bright."